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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the recommendations of the First Caribbean Conference in Mental Retardation held in Jamaica (1970) which have not been implemented in most territories. Focus is placed on adaptation of existing curricula in teacher education to include course work and practica opportunities in special education. Attention is also given to the packaging of multi-media materials which could be produced in the region by local personnel for use in public information programs. (Author/SBH)

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Special Education in Economically Deprived Areas

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Abstract

This paper addresses itself to the recommendations of the First Caribbean Conference in Mental Retardation held in Jamaica, West Indies in 1970 which have not been implemented in most territories at this time.

Focus is placed on adaptation of the existing curricula in teacher education to include course work and practica opportunities in Special Education. Attention is also given to the packaging of multi-media materials which could be produced in the region by local personnel for use in public information programs.

Special Education in Economically Deprived Areas

A review of the proceedings of the First Caribbean Conference on Mental Retardation held in Jamaica, West Indies in 1970 indicated the needs, the limited resources, and approaches to programming in Special Education which existed in several English and non-English speaking territories at that time and are not yet resolved.

This presentation is, therefore, an attempt to relate the identified needs of developing countries in the Caribbean area regarding their educational programs to practical suggestions for implementation. This writer hypothesizes that developing countries should not and need not duplicate successful Special Education training programs of developed countries (for obvious financial reasons). The suggestion is, therefore, offered that well-established training programs for regular teachers in developing countries should be adapted but not diluted. Graduates would then be trained to meet the educational needs of the majority of children without regard to "normality" or learning disorder. The necessity to offer a meaningful educational experience to all children in developing countries is closely related to the need to maximize economic and technological productivity in these regions.

Making It Happen

Precept 1: First consideration should be given to the political systems and the teacher education systems, convincing them that a representative percentage of students are not benefitting presently from the system of education as practiced.

a) Major argument would be the employability of persons with varying levels of exceptionality.

b) Education is considered by parents to be vitally important. Despite varying degrees of poverty there is always the desire to urge the children to achieve at a higher level than their parents did.

c) Most governments attempt to prioritize education and do consider children as a valuable commodity. For most independent nations, the prevailing idea is that more and better educated people can contribute to the country's need to maximize industrialization and develop trained manpower.

Focus would be placed on Deno's Cascade System of Special Education Services with emphasis on Levels 1 and 2 as the starting point. This would be accompanied by a feasibility plan for using the existing educational system for providing services for these levels.

Precept 2: A consortium of persons representing education, medicine, and social services should develop a prescribed program of operations (with reference to a feasibility proposal). Consideration should be given to pilot projects, regional emphases and extent of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Consideration should also be given to curriculum needs and adaptation, staff training, and possible types of adjunctive services.

Precept 3: Resources should be properly allocated to develop curricula materials based on determined need. An educational committee should be assigned full-time role responsibilities for the development and implementation of materials using existing basic curriculum.

Focus should be on task analysis and sequencing of instruction with a minimum of equipment.

Consideration should be given to the feasibility of providing alternative learning experiences in the existing classroom structure. Methodology should be determined which would be most acceptable to teachers. Input should be obtained from in-service teachers.

Pre-service and In-service Education: Planning and Implementing

An examination of teacher-training programs which have had or do have colonial relationship with Great Britain indicates that the British model is still used. Two elements of this model are:

1) Teacher-training colleges which provide a 3-year program leading to a non-graduate teaching diploma.

2) Universities which provide a one-year post-baccalaureate program in educational methodology and practice leading to the Diploma in Education.

PROPOSAL A

The Diploma in Education curriculum should be adapted to introduce pre-service teachers to the following competencies:

-Knowledge of each major category, developmental level, and severity of handicap in exceptional children.

-Knowledge of behavioral characteristics, common identification and assessment procedures, and significant new research.

-Knowledge and application of a skill training approach for individualizing instruction.

-Ability to apply effectively practical strategies in daily management of classrooms.

-Ability to use daily and direct measurement of learning and classroom behaviors to adapt and/or improve instructional strategies.

Selected graduates from this program would be given the opportunity to practice these skills in a clinical setting with a view to their assuming roles as teacher-trainers or consultants.

The focus would be on the development of local staff persons who are cognizant of the cultural assumptions and language skills necessary for acceptable communication.

PROPOSAL B

The Teacher-Training College curriculum should be adapted to introduce pre-service teachers to the competencies stated in Proposal A. Graduates of these institutions staff the Primary Schools for the most part, and this is seen as a logical place to introduce a modified cascade system of Special Education services.

Practice in the above-listed skills would be provided as a part of the student teaching experience.

PROPOSAL C

An in-service program would be presented to practicing teachers in the Primary Schools which would provide training to develop the competencies listed in Proposal A.

Consultants who were trained under Proposal A would be assigned to each in-service teacher. The major responsibility of the consultant would be to make regular classroom visits and observations in order to provide feedback on techniques being practiced.

Population to be Served

It is suggested that a pilot project in a select number of schools in the urban/suburban areas be selected. Proximity to the Teacher Colleges and University would be the major criterion for selection.

Concentration would be centered on the Primary Schools.

The major problem is the extension of the program to serve rural areas. In more advanced countries attempts are being made to provide adequate transportation routes and locate industry in many rural areas, but the problem of staffing schools in these areas does exist.

Hopefully demonstrated success with a pilot project might be the key to convincing governments to provide incentives for assuming teaching positions in rural schools.

An important consideration is the fact that, for the most part, psychological testing and I.Q. determinations are not practiced. There have been some attempts at developing norms for Tests of Developmental Disabilities and Attitude Scales but use is not widespread. Therefore, the criteria for a student being considered as handicapped should continue to be medical evidence or inability to achieve in school.

It would seem, therefore, that the development of criterion-referenced academic assessment measures using the instructional materials available in the schools would be the most appropriate devices to use.

It must be mentioned here that the gifted or academically superior child in many of these countries are often recognized at a very early age. Recognition is usually a function of the type of school they attend. They receive tremendous amounts of encouragement and assistance from parents and teachers with the expectation that they will achieve excellence. In the Primary schools they are often used to assist the teachers of younger children. However, there is evidence to suggest that other potentially gifted children are unrecognized, particularly if they happen to attend schools in densely populated urban areas or in rural provinces.

The concept of Special Education being considered for economically deprived areas is that all children are individuals and special, therefore, teaching techniques can be modified to meet the needs of a variety of children in the classrooms.

Community Involvement

Community involvement is a collaborative process involving parents, students, educators, and lay citizens working together to achieve mutually desired goals. Local community groups can render invaluable assistance to organizations implementing special education programs. They can act as sounding boards to the organization, as communication links between the school organizations and the

community and as community monitors for supportive community activities.

The basic philosophy for establishing a community link is an abiding respect for the determination of a variety of oppressed/depressed groups who feel that their needs are not being considered by their respective governments. They should be allowed to have a greater voice in educational decisions affecting their children. Quite often their children are representative of unrecognized giftedness or unserved because of handicaps.

Once this involvement has been established then media programs can be developed for television and radio with presentation being at a level such that it is understandable to these groups.

It is suggested that any program which attempts to meet the need/s of the high percentage of underprivileged persons in these developing countries will meet with some acceptance from governments providing the following conditions are met:

1) Low cost
2) Use of political influence without impinging on the power structure.
3) Prepare local people to meet the needs of their fellow countrymen.

For the most part, media are controlled by the governments in power and are widely used for political as well as educational purposes. In some countries this influence is felt even in the most remote rural areas. Because it is not used solely as an entertainment device, it is seen as a possible source for educating the community and gaining their support.

Materials to be Used for Teacher-Training

Needed:

1) A government which has desirable status in the developing nation under consideration.
2) A University which has or is willing to develop the basic training modules.

3) A government which has well-established programs of Special Education.

An hypothesis for consideration would be the formation of a consortium between the University of the West Indies, Department of Education and The Ohio State University, (OSU), Department of Education, Faculty for Exceptional Children. Materials developed by this faculty for training teachers in the areas mentioned in the proposals would provide the basis for developing modules to be used at the University of the West Indies, (UWI).

The UWI faculty in collaboration with OSU faculty would then develop filmed or taped sequences of classroom life in the local setting which best depicts the concept being taught (e.g. impulsive behaviors). This practical example of classroom life, together with the printed training material and theoretical studies on specific concepts would be considered a protocol. As protocols are developed they would gradually reflect the training needs of the local teachers with OSU providing the research data/theoretical constructs that would make the training meaningful.

At the present time travel is severely restricted in many of these countries and it would create a hardship for teachers or teacher trainees to visit the OSU campus to participate in practicum experiences or observations of exemplary classrooms. However, it is suggested that filmed sequences of the teaching behaviors or workshops could be sent to UWI as an addition to the training protocols. This would be considered as a satisfactory starting point without the additional financial strain and problems of travel.

Summary

The focus of this paper has been on the Caribbean region because of this writer's personal identification with the cultural heritage and existing problems. No attempt has been made to suggest a time-line for implementation. It is possible that a 7-year program might produce results that would suggest

suitability for wider dissemination. Periodic evaluation and adaptation would ensure the viability of the end product.

The emphasis has been on producing teachers with broad-based skills who can effectively meet the needs of a wider range of children on an individual basis. The cost effectiveness factor is represented in the expansion of existing programs rather than the institution of separate programs. Ideally, if the viability of this concept could be documented it might produce a model for countries on a lower scale of development and with related needs.

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